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ERIS



Blanche Sheemaker Wagner



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ERIS

BOOKS BY
Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff

THE SONG OF YOUTH

WOVEN OF DREAMS

ATYS

ALCESTIS

ERIS



From the Original Pastel by Paul Hellen

BLANCHE SHOEMAKER WAGSTAFF

ERIS

A

DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

BY

Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff



NEW YORK
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TO HENRI BERGSON

“ La vie est un combat entre le spectre du
passé et l'élan vers l'avenir.”—*Bergson*.

“ The mind is its own place and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”
—*Milton*.

“ Make not thy thoughts thy prison.”—*Shakespeare*.

“ Where but to think is to be full of sorrow.”—*Keats*.

CHARACTERS:

MAN
THOUGHT, *A Demon*
THE PAST, *A Spirit*
THE FUTURE, *A Spirit*

Eris: A Dramatic Allegory

SCENE: *A Wide Plain*

Man



AM alone, yet nevermore alone!
For in the aching abyss of the air
Tremble a thousand phantasms of the
brain,

A conjured mimicry of things unseen,
A seething maelstrom of distorted shapes
That smirk and gibe with tongues of bitter hate,
Strange eyeless gnomes and painted fairies bright
That wander 'mid the shadows; and black bats
Having the forms of men. . . . By night, by day
I walk amidst this maddening multitude,
I hearken to the chatter of strange voices,
I watch strange antic loves that go unnamed
On earth; and oft I feel the ghostly touch
Of frenzied kisses that the world would scorn,—
(The far forgotten world of things unreal!)
I laugh with apish revels, harlot joys,

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

I take unto my bosom wandering ghouls
That have lain dead and cankerous many years,
And I caress weird dreams that mock my lips. . . .

At midnight when the moon is hanging low
White lads come forth and bare their ivory limbs
Romp like snow-deer 'neath the laurel boughs
Singing wild wanton songs of vanished hours
When Charmides was playing on his lute. . . .

At dawnrise elfin creatures of the sky,—
Pale dryads from the star-paths, call to me,
Weaving bright dewy garlands for my hair,
And from far myrtle islands of my fancy
They waft the scent of amaranth and musk,
Winding my body with fantastic flowers
White as the bosom of a Paphian dove!

Sometimes the wind on fair Daedalian wings
Brings me a vision on the married air,
And as of old I tremble 'neath the touch
Of damask lips and dark dishevelled tress,—
And from the turgid heaven music pours,
Torrential tunes that float upon the breeze,
While in my lonely heart a lost grief swells
Immortal as the black-browed Niobe,
And from some perfumed Cytherean isle
Love calls me with his piteous pale eyes.

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

I am encompassed by a wilderness,
A desert of illimitable dream,
And my enfettered spirit sadly strays
Within the rampart of tormenting thought. . . .
[*Enter Thought.*]

Thought

Could you then live without me?

Man

Ah, too well,
Cruel tyrant, demon of my soul's unrest!

Thought

I am the spirit's agent, thus decreed
To dwell imprisoned in the temporal shell,
I am the force of an empyrean realm
Consecrated to confines terrestrial.

Man

How admirably has Nemesis devised
This alien sphere of earth to tenant you
Unto the last commiserating hour
When mortal shall be freed of your dominion!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Am I your slave condemned to endless weal?
O, Sisyphean shade, for at your will
I twinge with pain, or my poor soul commits
A thousand follies in the name of joy,—
While you observe me silently, O fiend,
Your visage kindled by a Titan glee!

Thought

I am the Universe! I am a part
Of the great cosmic heart that gave me birth,
'Midst the innumerable harmonies
Wrought by the birth-pangs of my mother, Chaos,
The choral of a million spheréd stars
Quivered the sky, and from the cavernous springs
The rainbow-skirted daylight trembled forth
Illumining the muffled dark with light,
And all the amber-fretted seas and heavens,
The almond vales and wild enmarbled cliffs,
The dusky groves and anthemed surfy shores
From east to west encircling the wide globe
Shone with the glory of my natal hour!

Man

You deem yourself a deity forsooth?

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Thought

Yea, I can swell Aeolian lyres with song,
And vesture day with an incarnate joy,
My touch can turn the darkness into dawn
Or waken Amphion lutes to minstrelsy;
The burgeoning fields shout forth a wondrous bloom,
The sky peals thunder at my giant tread.

Man

Accurséd shadow that withholds the sun!
Accurséd torture-chamber of the soul!
You are the grave of the unburied dead. . . .

Thought

I hold the secrets of the infinite,
The alchemy of human suffering,
And the impalpable beauty of the stars.

Man

Source of the miseries of unhappy man!
The sepulchre of hope.

Thought

Nay, the throne of joy!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man (aside, supplicating)

Ah, to have one brief hour of soothing ease
Within a leafy glade where I could rest
Unmindful of this monstrous weariness,
Unmindful of this stress man calls the brain,
Unmindful of the presence of this demon.
. . . Only a little space to find sweet peace
Crowned by a vaporous serenity
Amid soft voices of the cooing birds,
My brow soothed by the mossy forest's cheek,
My weary soul bathed in oblivion!

Thought

I am the brother of oblivion . . .
Wrought of the Void, I hold the spell of sleep.

Man

I cry to my lost Love, deliver me!
And when I hear his wide wings in the sky
I dream that peace emerges with the dawn,
I dream that Love will yield nepenthine calm,
And like a child I cower 'neath his touch
When lo! I find thought hidden in Love's breast,
The canker in the petal of the rose!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Thought

Love is my child, my child of aureate dew
Whom the mosses mothered and Apollo kissed,
His coronal is hawthorn and he culls
The beauty of the constellated dome.

Man

I brave the fresh storm in its furious blast,
Naked I leap from bough to rivulet
Hastening through fields of marigold when dusk
Is luminous with white tranquillity;
I follow quiet birds unto their nests,
I hear the sylvan voices of the night
When pluméd stars are quivering in the west;
Darkling, I roam beside the glaucous sea
Watching pied day unwind her auburn hair;
I drink the rainbow-foam of pebbled seas,
I bathe in Hesperus' blazing glow, and romp
With careless children seeking butterflies
Blown like pink rose-buds 'gainst the turquoise sky;
I wade in amber pools that woo the clouds
And hear the nymphs of Amphitrite sing;
I gather shells and kiss their tinted lips
Seeking to drain the delvéd minstrelsy,
I hunt for honey with the humming-bird

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

In scarlet-tasselled vines that creep the rocks;
I climb the mountain's summit where the snow
Purples the glacial crests like gemméd crowns.
I watch the eagle in his splendid flight
Envious of his infinite disdain,
Or follow some fallen star that smites the dark;
And then I wander by dim sleeping lakes
All scent and lily-blossom where the swans
Prune their white wings in stately idleness
And bright bees murmur on their amorous quest
Beneath the heavy shadows of the trees.

Weary, I seek the battled ways of men
Mingling within the noise of multitudes
Where sin and sorrow stalk uncomforted.
I see the heavy-hearted human throng,
I listen to their chatter of despair
Goaded, as they, by idle dreams of gold,
And pleasure that is false and pitiful . . .

Harassed, I find again the vernal lanes
Far from the gilded city's dreary din,
And when the dawn has swung the vaulted sky
And through the glow of Lucifer, wheeléd clouds
Flutter like azure halcyons, and the woods
Are tinkling with the Naiads' vibrant songs
I seek the desolate grave-yards of the dead

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Where grateful spirits slumber 'neath the sod,
Unthinking in their calm incomparable;
I linger hoping to partake of peace,
Feeling the silence greet me like a kiss,
Where scent and blossom marry the sweet air
And the globed dew is like a rainbow wand
Imparting some celestial harmony.
Alas, I am denied the sleeper's peace,
In every perfumed lair, in glade or grove,
In flower-inwoven field or tawny mount
I cannot free myself from you, O Thought—
The viper lurking in the Auroral air!

Thought

Man without me is but a puling clod.

Man

Mortal divest of you remains sublime
Clad in the primal beauty of the race,
The savage splendour of the orient past,
The god endowed with unalloyed sublime!

Thought

There is no god but thought. The human mind
Contains the spark of arch-divinity.

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY.

Man

Knowledge is suffering; the cerebral realm
Maddened with ceaseless image knows no peace . . .
Ah, only to the child the world is sweet
When on the threshold of experience,
Unmindful of the misery of life,
Bathed in the glow of iridescent hope,
Still purified in instinct and desire,
Unclouded by the sullen mist of thought.

Thought

You cannot vanquish me while life endures.

Man

Even the heart's dream no longer is a dream
When carrion doubt destroys its comeliness.

Thought

Then would you be released as madmen are,
Cleft from the gyves of reason and cast out
Adrift upon a sea of aimless shadow?

Man

Yea! sent adrift upon some azure wave
To weave the gauzy fabric of my dream

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

From rainbows or from painted butterflies,
Or reach down in the myriad sea and find
Some spangled fish to be my paramour!
To swoon upon the silvery breath of dawn
Caressed by roseate sunbeams from the sky
My body wound in some white wreath of foam,
Or pluck a radiant star-beam down to earth
And tread its shimmering aisles in ecstasy!

Thought

You envy those that are bereft of me?

Man

They who think not have every hope of joy
Environed by dull air and empty ease!

Thought

I bring you beauty. I am beauty's womb,
The source of all inebriating vision,
I wave Apollo's wand that woos the soul
With vistas of illimitable loveliness,
Bright towers of chrysoprase and coral beds
In fair Uranian realms. Would you renounce
The hope of future things, and the sweet past?

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man

I am so weary of dead livid hours,
Dead joys that mock me with their phantom guile,
Dead kisses like fresh wounds upon my lips,
Dead passions in their haunting melancholy.
I would be rid of every moment past,
Of every corpse and carrion memory,
Sublime, unsuffering, without human taint
Untrammelled by despair, hate, envy, fear,
By fallacy, and cant, and caste and custom,
As when in some anterior age I slept
A babe and suckled in the kissing sun!
[*The Past, a fantastic fairy, half witch, flits back
and forth.*]

Man

Look, yonder flits your progeny! It roams
Like some false painted spectre o'er a tomb;
Ah, long ago I buried it with tears,
But lo, your venom power waked the dead!
See how the sombre eyes cajole my gaze,
And the stark frame in hideous mimicry
Shudders its oldtime lure! The cerecloth falls
And once again I see the spectral shape
Of vanished love, dust-shrouded yet still fair!
Upon my maddened lips lost kisses rain

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

And on my bosom swoons a girlish form,
Fragrant with summer spice and wooing breath
And locks dark clustered like an ebon cloud.
Her mouth is like the breath of some fresh grave,
Salt with the cankered mould of brackish earth . . .
(Love that is death, and death that is but love!)

Thought

To suffer is the destiny of man,
As long as I live, so the past must live!

Man

Is there no spot on earth where I am free
Of your cruel vigilance?

Thought

Perchance in sleep
Death's nursling child.

Man

Nay, slumber does not ease,
For dark is shot with dreams of other lives,
And haunted with wild images terrible,
The stalking spirits of the world of Void,
The ghoulish phantoms of my nether brain!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY.

Thought

Only in Death is there consummate peace.

Man

Death holds aloof from me like some dread foe.
[*The Future, a tinselled and bizarre fairy, flits back
and forth with pleading seductive smiles.*]

Behold! another malison, the Future!
Life is a futile war between the Past
And the longed-for tomorrow. There is no peace
Nor no today. The present is a dream.

Thought

Robbed of my domination man would own
Only the glittering aura of an hour!

[*Exit.*]

Man

Ephemeral present, exquisite and fleet!
The flash of a diaphanous butterfly,
The aroma of some white-crowned hyacinth,
The soft lips of a lover sealing mine,
The myriad-tinted rainbow in its flight,—
The sweet-sucked honey from a blooming flower,

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

The dying beauty of a summer day,
The last bird's note at nightfall through the dusk,
The wavy glimmer of a field of wheat,
The yellow feather of a new-blown moon!

The Past

Would you renounce my glory evermore?

[*Sings.*

Would you forsake
The joy I bring,
No more partake
Of philtred spring?

Man

Go from me! I disdain your mock delight,
Obsessed by demons of an eerie world
My days and nights are shaken by your spell.

The Past

O, once I was a maiden beautiful
With starry locks, a shy impassioned girl
You took to be your bride long years ago,
When you were young and amorous and glad.
You loved each little curl that hung my brow

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

And your fond hands knew rapturously by rote
Each hidden beauty-nook that once was mine,
And our blithe footsteps strayed in fairy lanes
Through blossoming springs in scented rose-wreathed
vales. [Sings.]

I was beautiful, fair,
With stars in my hair,
A silvery girl
You took for your bride
In amorous pride.
You loved each curl
That clustered my face,
And your sweet embrace
Found every hid nook
Of my beauty's grace.
We loved: and we took
Paths amid fair lands
Through the April weather
In the wind together.
Our rose-wreathed hands
And our nimble feet
Rapturous, fleet.

Man

Can the dead speak? Are you a lonely wraith?
(Oh, memory that will never know a grave!)

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

The Past

I am she you loved. Look on me,—my lips ache
To rest on yours. Yea, I am she you lost
So perilously fair, for whom you gave
All human things that you might touch my mouth.
My kiss was heaven and doom, and our desire
Once kindled the gray night with scarlet flame.

[*Sings.*

I am she, I am she
Whom you loved!
I cry from Eternity,
I call you to me.
I am she
Whom you loved,
Perilously fair,
With stars in my hair . . .
Death ne'er could conspire
To thwart love's desire;
I am radiant yet,
You could never forget
In the shroud of the tomb
Where the wild flowers bloom.

Man

I feel like one who sees the whirling world
Smitten with sudden fire. Within my heart

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

The quickened spring leaps in torrential bloom
As when my love lay panting in my arms
Submissive like an ebon-tresséd child.

The Past

Beneath the cypress shades in Italy,
Fainting with kisses, long entwined we lay,
The silver lake a mirror for our love,
The little birds that twittered in the pools
Chanting majestic chorals for our joy,
The crystal air was like a marriage chime,
The sky was shining with a thousand gems.
You were so white and trembling on the grass!

[*Sings.*

The radiant day
In vanished May
In the cypress shade
Where entwined we lay.
The pale lake made
A mirror for your body cool;
Nearby gold birds were bathing in
a pool.
The crystal air
Was like a kiss, and fainting thus
The calm skies envied us,
You were so white and fair!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man

I shall expire remembering; the dream
Is but a fugitive breath upon the breeze.
. . . Tell me, fair demon, are you woman's beauty
Or the incarnate spirit of all pain?

The Past

I am Love; the fusion of two entities,
The blind goal of man's unenlightened ways,
His pitfall and his beautiful sad hope,
His solace and his incommensurate doom,
Twin-brother of white death, I waft the dawn
And fair ambrosial fancies for his soul.
I am the voice of music and of stars,
I am the gate of immortality,
I am the one wild hour of perfectness!

[*Sings.*

I am Love,—the shining goal
Of every human soul,
The solace and the doom,
The glory and the gloom,
Death's fatal fair caress,
I am the song of sun and stars,
The portal that unbars
A moment's perfectness!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man

Cease, cease! what woman are you in disguise
What fairness consummate, incarnadine?
Are you Pandora cast forth from the sky
Curst with the magic evil of her wiles?
Or are you radiant Helen come again
To wreck a thousand hearths with passion's flame,
Or are you Cleopatra's serpent kiss
That felled a kingdom? Are you Phryne white
Whose glorious nakedness was Hellas' pride?
Are you Antigone who roamed the earth
Crowned in a watery diadem of tears,
Or yet Aspasia, wisdom's paramour,
Or Lilith, the first sin-tainted mate of man,
Or Phædra whose wild ardour was despair;
Are you Yseulte whose dream-enfiltered love
Allured her to immitigible doom,
Or Balkis, Sheba's queen the sorceress
Whose pompous armies stirred the sullen east?
Or are you Deborah, of Israel's power,
Or winged Apollo's unrequited love
Cassandra, whose fair lips rewarded Troy,
Or are you she whom Matho died to win
Salamambo, dusky maiden of the South?
O, are you lovely Sappho, lyric-crowned,
She whom Favonius envied of her song

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

When Lesbian vales were glimmering with girls
And many voiced lyres of minstrelsy.
Or are you Izevl whom great Buddha sought
Within the Himalayan-shadowed plains,
Or yet Francesca, tawny tresséd one
Slain in the shameful rapture of her love,
Or Mary the immaculate bride of heaven,
Or fair Zenobia, or Beatrice
The fleshless dream of singing centuries!

The Past

I am all women; yet I am but one.

[*Sings.*

I am all women,
The breath of an eternal May,
I am she you loved
And cast away!

Man

O, you are Proserpine whose kiss was doom!
You are the ghost that stalks the moon's white orb,
Driving men mad with beauty terrible.
I would smite love as some unholy thing!

The Past

You cannot kill what once you loved. It crawls
With the red worms within the sepulchre!

[*Sings.*

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

O Love's fair bloom
Fades not within the tomb.
As deathless as some re-incarnate
dove
Is love!

Man

An end there must be to my suffering!
[*The spirit of the Future flits back and forth.*]

The Future

I am the oracle of hope; my song
Awakes new life upon the sodden earth,
And when I spread my rainbow-tinted wings
The frosted streams leap blithely and the birds
Break into sudden chanting: man's dull heart
Thrills at my name: I am his mortal quest.
[*Sings.*]

I am the hope of the sad.
My song makes all the weary glad.
When I spread my wings
The snow-frosted springs
Burst from the earth,
Bright summer sings
And beauty has birth,

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man's heart is aflame
At the sound of my name.
Come to my breast,
I am your quest!

Man

In youth you were my horizon of joy,
You lured me with your painted wings of fire,
I worshipped you, and sought your illusive lore
As a lover dreams of the unknown caress,
But you were cruel and nurtured me on guile . . .
Go from me! You can grant me no new grace
I have not had, grown weary of, and lost!

The Future

New love I promise to your lonely heart
And halcyon dreams and fair felicitous hours,
Worship again with youth's credulity
And I shall bless you with a soothing hope.

[*Sings.*

I promise new love
And the joy thereof,
Dreams for your heart;
O, quaff my nectar sweet,
Come kneel beneath my feet
And your woe will depart!

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man

Your promises are but delusion's snare!

Future

I am the vestal luminance of life,
I tend the heart-sick with a brimming hope.

[*Sings.*

I am the lustral glow
That lights the earth's sad face,
Man is glad at my embrace,
He must perish if I go!

Man

You are the undawned dream that dies still-born,
Begotten in the sterile womb of faith.

Future

I bid you laugh and live and love anew,
I offer compensation for the past
And when my song is heard upon the earth
The world grows golden with renascent light.

[*Sings.*

Come unto me and smile,
Forego the sorry past awhile;

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

And hear the sylvan meadow as it
sings
Awakened by the glimmer of my
wings!

Man

Taunt me no more with your tormenting wiles!
[*Exit Future.*

I cannot longer bear this martyrdom,
This gloom bedimming the fair face of earth,
This demon in whose grasp I writhe and weep
This pageant of despair,—this strumpet Thought!
[*Enter Thought.*

Thought

What will you do to free yourself of me?

Man

I would Caduceus' opiate-rod were mine
The serpent-twinéd amulet of ease!
I shall away from this enhaunted spot,
Quitting my natal clime for other lands,
Seeking in some invisible far realm
A respite sweet, wandering where men are not,
Within the perfumed valleys of the east . . .

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Perhaps some crystal morning I shall wake
And find my spirit chastened of its curse,
Crowned in renascent splendour like a flower
May-freshened in some scintillating vale,
And clarified by space like a bright comet
Sundered of time and all locality.

Thought

Your quest is futile;—but essay, begone.
The trackless sands hold promise of deep peace.

Man

Farewell! farewell! yon wind shall be my guide
And I shall soar dew-gemméd on the dawn
Wreathed in the raiment of a snowy cloud
Seeking some freedom from my soul's dark curse.

SCENE II: *A Larissan Vale (Greece)*

Man



HAT spell pursues my soul that I should
find

No peace in passage through this em-
battled world?

I traversed seas, I hid beneath the earth,
I gazed upon the faces of the stars
And wandered in still vales of almond bloom;
I climbed enmarbled cliffs to glimmering caves
And watched the auburn day illumine the sky,
I scaled blue cragginess on misty mounts
And waded in the muffled dark of clouds,
I sought the tawny splendour of old fanes
Hidden in lampless shadows, and I watched
The dusk grow crimson on the architraves,
I fed my weary eyes on ancient crypt
And rose-ensanguined ivory and gem;
I went by stealth across the Nubian sands
To gaze upon the supine majesty
Of Rameses within his earthen tomb!
I strayed Thessalian meadows where the lark

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Woood the pale lips of lonely irises,
And Hermes in his august splendour, smiled.
I roamed with jaguars in the jungled night
And slept on weedy marshes with my bow
Where Marsyas' music murmured in the glade;
I sought strange grottoes in a wooded cleft
And bathed in murky streamlets cavernous
Beneath the unsunned spaces of the earth;
I viewed the tinted Kremlin of the North
Crossing Siberia's wilderness of plain;
I followed rapid rivers in their course
Wading in brackish forests where the owl
Hooted in dismal solitude: I scaled
Bright crimson rills in flowering Tripoli;
And knelt in awe before the Taj Mahal
On shoals of seas sequestered in the east.
I heard strange desert melodies and laughed
With painted harlots in the candlelight,
I saw weird Bedouin dances 'neath the moon
And woman's nakedness became a curse.

I stood by blazing craters, and the night
Grew blood-red with majestic Etna's flame,
I mused by sapphirine bay, and watched the rose
Spangling the hillside with its lambent flame
Within cerulean islands in the sea.
I heard the tongues of seers and savages

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Chanting their hymns of wisdom and of lust;
I climbed the crumbling castles of the Rhine,
Stepping from crag to crag on dizzy height
Where birds made fairy anthems and the air
Was shot with sunbeams from a heavenly bow.

In Lombardy I followed blue canals
And hunted golden willow-buds in May,
I knelt beside the tomb of Juliet
Mingling my tears with aeoned anguish past,
I roamed where emperor and poet dreamed
In Veronesian sun . . . The watery vale
Of Vacluse held me spellbound with its lore,
And ghostly Laura touched me by the hand. . . .

In Venice I spread sail with Capulet
And plied an oar across the green lagoons
The soft air vibrant with the minstrels' song;
I dreamed in Pisa's woodland and the gulf
Of Lerici, where once again I heard
The lyric echo of pure Shelley's voice.
On Pæstum's glory and on Dougga's mount
I studied metope and fluted frieze
Hearing the voice of Carthaginian kings
Watching their phantom barks come up the bay.
In Syracusan caves I roused the cries
Of Dionysius' Greeks engulfed in rock,

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

And Cæsar's shadow led me through old Rome.
I followed Hadrian's footprints to El-Djem
Where gazing on the prairie coliseum
My soul stood rapt in beauty's silent awe.

In Lesbian valleys, myrtle-grown and sweet
I strayed to the old tunes of Mytilene
Where white Gyrinna played her dolorous lyre;
I saw again the fairness of young girls
Full bosomed and defiant as they passed
Sun-lit with amorous longing on their lips,
And lads who walked with shuddering hips that
 touched,
Twin-lilies on a swaying stalk of dream!

I paced Girgenti's ruins and a throng
Of ancient bards held converse with my soul;
I heard the pastoral chants of Theocritus,
And Plato's wisdom echoed through the walls,
While weeping for lost beauty, Phaon pale
Wandered in shadowy silence on the hill.

Haunted by visions old, at length I sought
The desert's glory of infinitude
Hoping to find in Allah's sea of sand
Serenity at last,—beneath the skies

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Of orient sapphire, tended by soft winds,
'Tis said man is no longer slave of Thought
But soars in spirit-peace like the wide sun
That sprinkles all the heavens with its jewels.
Breeze-borne and bodiless I yearned to be
Absolved of every mortal human woe
And pinnaced in the unpavilioned dome
Wooed by ineffable, Elysian calm . . .
Alas! alas! my quest has brought no peace,
I have not found in all my wanderings
An instant's freedom from the demon Thought,
The ravenous monster, greedy of its prey,
The deathless vampire sealed upon my soul.

Reason is false! give back the infinite vision
When man was wooed by concerts of the stars!
Life is an empty search for perfectness,
And instinct, once sublime, is steeped in shame!
The Universe is a prism and each chant
Of shower or grain of dust, or eager stream,
Each dewdrop trembling on a flower's lip,
Each sable-breasted banner of the night,
Each moon, each planet in the limpid vault,
Each inarticulate harbinger of Spring,
Each chiming wind, illusive eye of dawn,
Each aureole of sunlight in the blue,
Each bud dilating and each tranced cloud

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Is but reflection of infinitude,
The singing voice of an eternal beauty.

And, Thought, are you the attenuated spark
That in a primal state of perfectness
Once lit with magic sense the soul of man,
The breath of ageless immortality,
The messenger of an anterior life,
The conquering silence of eternity
Corrupted by the pestilential earth
Whose doom is degradation and despair?
And are you given your terrestrial guise
To haunt man with the sin of other lives,
Your tyranny the penance of old wrong,—
Each æon but a conquest of the spirit
Veering toward its triumphal harmony.

O Thought, must we be comrades to the end,
Till some gigantic flood shall sweep us far
Amid the demolished débris of mankind
Annihilated by the Ultimate Void?

Courage, my soul . . . I must not yield my quest.
Undaunted I shall seek unto the last
. . . Onward, forever onward I shall fare
From these still vales to some transcendent slope
Beyond all mortal bourne . . . Perhaps aloft
Bathed in primeval space, I shall be free!

SCENE III: *Mount Parnassus.*

Man



At last I find the summit of the world!
Where sky and earth seem melting in
caress,
Where no birds sing, and the clear
hyaline
Hangs like a mirrored crystal o'er my head.
Here nothing lives, no mortal foot has trod
These unfrequented crags. The fields are gone
And the last lyric of the nightingale
I left late lingering on the violet air.
There is no sound. The mighty throne of Zeus
Hides like a cloud-veiled mist within the heavens;
I am so near divinity it seems
That I could tread the pathway of the stars;
Sweet martial music radiates the breeze
And harp tunes never heard by man before,—
Wild minstrelsy aërial, and notes
Of zephyrine softness swimming from the blue.
The summit of the world! . . . the dazzling sphere
Beyond the bourne of mortal visitation;

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

This august wilderness of solitude
Is beauty's rapt empyrean unalloyed
Where the pure spirit tastes of errant joy
Poised on the sunny auras of the sky.

How beautiful is all this azure scene!
Blent blue and amber mist upon the wave
Where rise the snow-peaks of the Sporades
Wreathed in a swooning cloud of amethyst.
Below the Delphian valleys lean away
Where once Apollo slew the Pythian dragon;
Like pale wraiths trembling in an emerald haze
The islands of the Archipelago,
And far the outline of Mount Athos peers;
Ossa and Pelion rise beneath the shade
Of grim Olympus, towering in the mist,—
And southward stretch the golden Phokian plains
Abrim with lakes that glitter serpentine;
Slumbering beyond the radiant Attic fields
The snowy flanks of Helikon appear,
And at the sea's edge, dim Arcadia,
Kellene and fair Chalmos lie asleep
Gilded by dying sun-glow. The white crown
Of Amphossa beneath the Kronan hill,—
And then,—the open sea's infinitude—
The shimmer and the promise of the wave
Inviolable and merciless as doom . . .

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

The pigmy world lies like a phantom vale,
Ye crags of giant mountains, ye are mine!
Ye mists innumerable encompassing me,
Ye avalanches crashing 'neath my feet,
Ye glacial pits that shine like molten moons,
Ye jewelled valleys shimmering far below,
Ye sulphurous volcanoes, ye wild clouds
That race like silver steeds across the sky,
Ye rushing streams and blasted shrubs, ye rivers
And pluméd ranges of unending peaks,
Ye forests of primeval oak and pine,
Ye lakes, and whirling planets of the dome,
Here I am free at last to own my soul!

[*Enter Thought.*

Thought

You frolic like a madman in the wind.
Your antic mirth has shaken all the sky.

Man

What wraith is this that greets my startled
sight? . . .

Thought

No apparition but reality.

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man

I faint . . . I tremble . . . am I crazed at last,
And is this ghost a mirage of the mind?

Thought

Come nearer. I am animate and warm.

Man

It was but a dream . . . a joy ephemeral,
A fairy vision hovering in my brain. . . .

Thought

You rave as one beset with visions wild,
Your countenance is strange and in your eyes
Delirium is brooding . . .

Man

O, kind Death,
Befriend me in this ultimate hour of need!

Thought

You sought to rend the veil,—to transcend self,
But it was futile, you are firmly bound

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

To me forever in the coil of pain
The pain begotten of the woman's womb,
The immemorial tragedy of birth.

Man (aside)

Envelope me within the cosmic heart
Freed of my separate hideous entity,
Blown with the wingéd dust from whence I came!

Thought

You suffer as all men. A similar curse
Scourges each separate individual soul,
The burden of the bloom of deathless light,
The ageless ache of human consciousness. . . .

Man

I have been ever lonely among men,
My passions were not theirs; my spirit trod
An alien path of exile miserable,
I was a stranger wandering on earth,
I could not love as others love. I sought
Some strange impossible loveliness unknown,
The moon-kiss of the dryad in the stream,
Some perfectness beyond all mortal bourne.

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Thought

It was the spirit seeking liberty
Rebellious in its gyve of mortal flesh.

Man

No longer can I bear this stress of sorrow . . .

Thought (approaching cliff's edge)

Gaze down upon yon cliff where the coiled mists
Like writhing serpents hiss in white embrace,
The earth is hid, and the huge ebon crags
Close in about us with their giant clasp.

Man

This deep abyss is seething with wild things,
Strange birds and reptiles and enhungered beasts
That claw each other with the will to live,
Who knows but that they suffer even as I . . .

Thought

The cavern echoes with their mating cries!

Man

The symbol of immortal misery.

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Thought

Yon sorry pit is life. . . . It calls to you
To join the maelstrom of its anguished throng,
Its pestilential brothel of despair!

Man

And yet above the placid dome of heaven
Dissolves in azure beams, while in the east
The quiet air is jewelled like a crown, . .
And the young wind is like a soft caress. . . .

Thought

We are alone beneath the face of God,
And silence beckons with its shadowy wings.

Man

How beautiful, how calm is yonder sky!

Thought

Come nearer to this rugged precipice.
. . . Hark how a loose stone echoes like a sob
In its mad riot down the mountain-side!

Man

Afar I see the hawthorn boughs in bud
Beckoning me like a shining bower of peace . . .

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Thought

Do you hear the rushing of the torrent streams
Crumbling the earth with crashing thunder-moan?

Man (fainting)

A dizziness . . . a gentle music lulls
My senses, and my spirit is upborne
On opalescent images of dream.

Thought

Even wilder melodies are in the air,
The roar of fathomless charnels dim and dark.

Man (wearily)

O master, let me rest my head awhile
My weary aching brow upon your breast.
. . . A feebleness o'ercomes me . . . and a cloud
Of blinding dust reels in my throbbing eyes.
I see flower-checked fields of asphodel
And infinite mild meadowlands of sleep.

Thought

The Cyclopean thunder moans aloud.

ERIS: A DRAMATIC ALLEGORY

Man (more wearily)

I seem to see the giddy planets reel,
If this is death it is too beautiful!
Can it be the end—? No! no! to live, to live!
To conquer, not to die—

[Grapples with Thought.

Demon, let me live!

Thought

Nay, peace has come at last, O, vanquished mortal!
How pitiful this unquenched will to live.
Through me your spark of being came to birth,
Through me it perishes like a blown leaf
Tottering against the crimson of the sky.
[They struggle together.

Man

I sink . . . I gasp . . . the dizzy earth recedes!
[Plunges over cliff.

*Thought (assuming a sudden intenser magnitude
rises out of the dust of Man.)*

At last to conquer after æons of strife—
The reeling stars man's silent sepulchre.

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